

25 August 2024 Bread of Life 4. Joshua 24:1-2 & 14-18 and John 6:56-69 Choices

This is the fourth part of the Bread of Life Discourse, following John's account of what Jesus says about the Bread of Life.

Cats or dogs?

Doughnut or focaccia?

Red or white?

We like to have choices, don't we? It gives us the feeling of empowerment when we can choose, and satisfaction when we can select what we want.

Our readings today highlight the life choices that we all face, how we make decisions, and ultimately where they lead.

I don't know about you, but I'm always suspicious of a free gift. The free pen when you enquire about health insurance. 'Shop now and get a free gift by return!' I always feel that the free gift actually comes with much more than I bargained for.

In our second reading, from John's Gospel, Jesus has been handing out some pretty juicy free gifts. Wonderful wedding favours at Cana. A get-well **now** card that actually works (at the pool at Bethesda). Free lunches for 5000 people. He's gathered a mass of followers who can't wait for the next one: what will it be? A lifetimes' supply of health, wealth and happiness, perhaps? But others have been drifting away. Is all this becoming too difficult? Just a few are left, still puzzled. What is the bargain that goes along with Jesus' free gifts?

I have a story from a couple I know very well. They were on their way, a long journey, to the funeral of someone very dear to them. He had become ill, and died within a few months, still in his prime. Filled with grief, but still thinking of practicalities, (funny how that happens, isn't it? In the midst of terrible grief, life.) they realised that they didn't have any bread and spotted a bakers' just off their route. It was in the middle of an industrial estate, and that struck them as strange. However, they needed bread, so they popped in. What was their surprise to find it was run by someone they knew, who was glad to share kind words and commiserations as well as serve them a loaf of nourishing bread.

A lovely story of God's comfort shared through ordinary people. They got real bread, sustenance for the day. In this passage, Jesus is clearly and repeatedly declaring that he offers the bread of life, the Holy Spirit, who opens up **eternity** for those who make that choice. Yes, a gigantic free gift! And yes, it comes with a massive commitment!

God has given us the intelligence to look at the evidence and to weigh up the pros and cons. We are allowed to make our own decisions. We can choose to attribute the good things in our lives to our own efforts, or to chance, (right place, right time?) or we can recognise the work of God in every blessing and accept God's invitation.

Perhaps there comes a time for making crucial choices in every lifetime. Joshua gathered the people of God at a vital moment and gave them an important choice. He was coming to the end of his life and he wanted to hammer home the message which God had given him to share. 'Look at all the good things in your history and in your lives now. All thanks to God's generosity. Now decide, 'Follow the old gods or choose our God'. Joshua declared his own decision to follow our God. 'As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.' The response was unanimous. The people considered the facts, made their choice. Joshua was a good friend, a wise advisor, a great prophet, and they respected his opinion.

Moreover, Jesus doesn't just give free gifts. He speaks unequivocally to his audience in Capernaum, an audience aware of the imminent and mortal danger of starvation and accustomed to the bloody sacrifice of animals. To us in Sunningdale, probably more concerned with losing a few pounds than the danger of starvation, and used to buying our meat nicely vacuum packed, he still gives the same straight alternative. Eat and live, or, like the surprise guest at the wedding feast, who had failed to put on the appropriate garb, be thrown out into the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus offers us body and blood, spirit and life, in exchange for simple but wholehearted hospitality. We must welcome him in unreservedly, he will abide in us and we in him. Faced with this difficult teaching, we must trust. As Peter says, there is no other way. Jesus is quite clear. Each one of **us** has been chosen already by the Father. We must make the commitment, just as Reverend Jon described last week, we must decide to believe and trust. Keep following, one foot in front of the other. The Spirit and the Life are waiting.

Let's pray.

Please Lord, Give us faith when things are difficult. Give us the eyes to perceive every good thing you give us and the courage to embrace the difficulties which beset us, knowing that by your grace we are loved and saved.

Amen.

**Fleur Pelly**